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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 MASERU 000176

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: MFA STRESSES POSITIVE U.S.-LESOTHO RELATIONS TO AF/S
DIRECTOR MOZENA

REF: A) MASERU 149 B) 04 MASERU 675

1. (U) SUMMARY: During his familiarization visit to Lesotho, AF/S Director Dan Mozena met April 4 with Minister of Foreign Affairs Monyane Moleleki. Ambassador Perry and DCM (notetaker) accompanied. Topics covered included the upcoming local elections, Zimbabwe, Swaziland, HIV/AIDS, Article 98, the U.S. - Southern African Customs Union (SACU) Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA). In particular, Mozena noted the sizeable progress in democratization in Lesotho since the 1998 unrest, contrasting it with recent developments in Zimbabwe, and stressed the keen attention being paid to the local government elections. He urged that the GOL sign an Article 98 agreement as soon as possible and that progress be made on the FTA. Praising the U.S. as a loyal friend of Lesotho, Moleleki said his government had similar concerns regarding Zimbabwe. He assured Mozena that the Article 98 issue was a top priority, although the matter had to be approached with a certain sensitivity towards Lesotho's role in creating the ICC. The Minister also expressed Lesotho's support for advancing the FTA negotiations and the MCA project approval process. The meeting's very positive overall tone highlighted the common interests of the U.S. and Lesotho on several important issues. GOL action is needed also, however. END SUMMARY.

2. (SBU) Mozena began by emphasizing the strong interest of the U.S. in Lesotho's April 30 local government elections, the first since independence, both as another advance in Lesotho's consolidation of democracy and as part of the overall trend towards democratic rule in southern Africa. Lesotho had made huge progress since the political turmoil and violence of 1998, holding free and fair national elections in 2002; the upcoming local elections would be another milestone. In addition, they would offer an especially stark contrast with the lamentable recent polls in Zimbabwe which are now the exception in the region. One hopes that the leadership in Swaziland will also take note of Lesotho's democratization, he added.

3. (SBU) Moleleki expressed deep concern with the situation in Zimbabwe, opining that the current regime is so entrenched that meaningful change may have to wait for a new generation of leaders. The GOL leadership is frustrated with Zimbabwe and while Chair of the SADC troika, had visited Mugabe urging him to address the serious issues facing the country. The GOZ, however, had not acknowledged the very difficult situation. Regarding Swaziland, Moleleki said that the GOL encourages King Letsie to talk to his Swazi counterpart about good governance. In addition, the SADC heads of state strongly engage King Mswati whenever the group meets.

4. (SBU) A significant amount of discussion focused on Article 98/ICC. Mozena and Ambassador Perry stressed the importance the USG attaches to this matter. Having an Agreement would be a real signal of the maturing U.S. - Lesotho bilateral relationship. The number of countries engaged by the U.S. on this issue who have not signed such a document continues to shrink, making Lesotho an increasingly conspicuous exception. While asserting that getting an Agreement was "at the top of my personal agenda and the right thing to do," Moleleki said the issue had to be approached with a certain sensitivity and "sense of timing," as Lesotho had played a prominent role in drafting the Rome Treaty. Mozena noted that Treaty provisions allow for an agreement of the type the U.S. desires, thus, there is no inconsistency with signing the latter; many other countries which had worked on the Treaty have, in fact, subsequently done an Article 98 Agreement with the U.S. The Minister promised to determine the right moment to try to secure the government's approval on this and that he may move to create that opportunity.

5. (U) Other topics were discussed briefly. Mozena reiterated the USG's commitment to helping Lesotho regarding HIV/AIDS; ultimately, however, the people and government of Lesotho will be the ones to win or lose the battle. He noted the progress made on Lesotho's MCA proposal, but stressed the importance of keeping the approval process moving forward. Progress on the U.S. - SACU FTA has stalled, and while we know Lesotho's commitment to pursuing such an agreement, there may come a point, unless the situation changes, when the USG is no longer interested. Moleleki expressed his complete support for the advancing the MCA process expeditiously. Similarly, the FTA

negotiations need to make progress; an upcoming meeting of SACU members (minus Swaziland) would take up this matter.

16. (SBU) COMMENT. The overall tone of the meeting was very cordial, with Moleleki concurring with much of the USG position on the various subjects discussed. The session also reinforced the positive relationship post and the USG have with both the minister and his government. The ultimate test of the GOL's commitment and effectiveness on the issues raised, however, will be action. Much progress has been made on the MCA

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proposal, for example, but a good deal of technical work remains to be done by the GOL (ref A). SACU has not meaningfully reengaged the USG on the FTA, regardless of Lesotho's genuine interest and leadership in pursuing an agreement. Moleleki seems to be our ally regarding Article 98, but the GOL's timelines have slipped since the end of last year (ref B). (Septel to follow.)

PERRY